Unit .36

Session .02

The Redeemer Calls His People Toward Renewal

Scripture

Revelation 3:14-22

14 "Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea: Thus says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the originator of God's creation: **15** I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. **16** So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of my mouth. **17** For you say, 'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,' and you don't realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. **18** I advise you to buy from me gold refined in the fire so that you may be rich, white clothes so that you may be dressed and your shameful nakedness not be exposed, and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see. **19** As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent. **20** See! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. **21** "To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. **22** "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."

Intro Options

Main Point:
Jesus calls His people to recognize their need for Him.

Option 1

Give every student two index cards. On one card, the student should write something that is sinful. On the other card, thee student should write something that is not sinful. Collect all the cards and then draw them out randomly one at time. Each time you draw a card out, read its contents to the group. The group should then decide whether that card lists a sin or a not-sin. Sort the cards into two piles: one for sins and one for not-sins.

Once you've gone through all the cards, the students how they know if something is sinful or not. Look at the things in the not-sin pile. Could any of them be sin? If sin is a matter of the heart, could we do any of the things listed on these cards in a way that doesn't point to Jesus as all-satisfying?

In today's session, we'll see a church that thought they were "good enough." However, their lukewarmness showed their problem: they were complacent and didn't recognize sin as they should have, so they didn't repent of sin like they should have. We'll see how important it is to recognize sin, to repent of it, and to remember the far-better joy that we have coming to us instead of sin's measly pleasures.

Option 2

Ask your students to produce the publication A Field Guide to Sin. It's the kind of guidebook a birdwatcher would have. They should produce a small fact sheet or booklet helping readers identify and deal with sin. Some components they might include:

- Identifying features of different sins
- "Habitat" where they are most likely to run into particular sins
- The "diet" of different sins: what those sins feed on
- How to deal with different sins (some you might flee from, others you might fight with particular verses, etc.).

Give them some time to make their guides and then to share them. They can make these guides in small groups; they can also make short "videos" (skits) if they'd prefer not to make a physical book.

Talk about how it is so important for us to identify sin, yet how sneaky and sly sin can be at times. When it comes to dealing with sin, the only real strategy for all sins is to repent, though the strategy to that repentance might look different for different people in different settings. In today's session, we'll see the importance of recognizing and repenting from sin in light of our glorious Redeemer.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Revelation 3:14-18.

Jesus had a specific message for each of the seven churches in Revelation, and the church at Laodicea was the last church He addressed. As He did with each church, He began with a reminder of who was addressing them. Jesus called Himself the "faithful and true witness" (v. 14). Jesus saw their true spiritual condition, and His faithful love compelled Him to reveal and correct them.

- **How might it be both fearful and comforting for Jesus to know your works?**

It is fearful that Jesus knows all of our works because we know we cannot hide our sin from Him. As Hebrews 4 says, we are all "naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account" (Heb. 4:13). And yet, it is comforting to know that even still, He loves us. He knows the worst thing we've ever done and still chooses us. We can be comforted by knowing that He sees our obedience and will reward it.

- **What made the Laodicean church lukewarm?**

The Laodiceans were wealthy and prosperous. Since they were financially secure, they lost their sense of need for God. They were no longer poor in spirit (Matt. 5:3). Their external wealth led to an internal pride. In contrast to Paul, who described himself as "having nothing, yet possessing everything" (2 Cor. 6:10), this church had everything, but was spiritually bankrupt. Ed Hindson painfully observes, "One could just as easily argue that Laodicea typifies the modern evangelical church: wealthy, prosperous, successful, and spiritually bankrupt."[1]

Spiritual pride and self-reliance make us ineffective for the kingdom because the real power is not in us, but in God. A spirit of self-sufficiency is sickening to Jesus (v. 16). He wants us to be useful for His mission, but He can't use a church that doesn't think it needs Him.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 88, DDG)

67. Repentance

Repentance is a response to God's gracious call to salvation. It includes a genuine sorrow for one's sin (Luke 5:1-11), a turning away from one's sin toward Christ (Acts 26:15-20), and a life that reflects lasting change and transformation (Ps. 119:57-60). It is the human counterpart to God's work of regeneration; in other words, the human side of our conversion.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus calls His people to recognize their need for Him.

Revelation 3:14-18

"To know that God knows everything about me and yet loves me is indeed my ultimate consolation."[2]

A common misunderstanding of this passage is to think Jesus was saying, "I wish you were either on fire for me (hot) or against me (cold), but you are lukewarm." But as James Hamilton writes, "The suggestion that cold opposition is better than lukewarmness does not seem to fit. Surely Jesus does not want a church to be cold to him."[3] So, Jesus wasn't telling a church that He preferred for them to be against Him. In this context, hot and cold water are both good things.

As Ed Hindson explains, "The basic designation of the church as 'lukewarm' is taken from the contrasting hot springs of nearby Hierapolis and the pure, cold waters of Colossae. By contrast, Laodicea was lukewarm. The phrase, 'I would that you were hot or cold' (3:15) refers to their usefulness or effectiveness. By contrast, the lukewarm spiritual condition of the church at Laodicea was virtually useless."[4]

Hot and cold water are useful (for drinking, cooking, bathing, etc.), but lukewarm water is not. This imagery of lukewarm water may be likened to the imagery of salt that has lost its saltiness – useless (Matt. 5:13). The Laodicean church could have been useful in a number of ways (hot or cold), but they had lost their kingdom effectiveness with their self-reliance (3:17) and sin (3:18-19). Jesus is telling the Laodiceans that only churches who see their need for Him, open their hearts to Him, and walk in repentance will be useful in His kingdom.

1. Edward Hindson, The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002.) p. 48
2. RC Sproul via Ligonier Ministries, Twitter post, May 6, 2014, 9:33 a.m., https://twitter.com/ligonier/status/463688112997412865?lang=en
3. James Hamilton Jr., Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches. (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012.)
4. Edward Hindson, The Book of Revelation: Unlocking the Future. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002.) p. 49
5. David Platt, Twitter post, March 14, 2013, 8:03 a.m., https://twitter.com/plattdavid/status/312187199632330752

In Defense (p. 90, DDG)

David Platt has said, "A materialistic world will not be won to Christ by a materialistic church."[5] The church at Laodicea lived in a prosperous city and was prosperous itself, but its prosperity led to spiritual laziness. The church members were too at home in the present world, and it hindered their missional effectiveness. If the gospel doesn't make us any different from the world, why should the people around us believe it? But when our lives match our message and Messiah—when it is evident that we are living for the life to come—then the truth of the gospel will be self-evident. A life that embodies our heavenly citizenship is a powerful witness to the truthfulness of the gospel.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Revelation 3:19-20.

Despite our spiritual pride, Jesus still loves the church He died to save. He did not expose the church in order to bring shame, but in order to restore it. Like a doctor, Jesus had to give the diagnosis in order to begin the healing. He offered to cover the church members' shame and renew their spiritual sight (v. 18). When He had every right to spit them out (3:16), Jesus stood at the door and knocked because He would rather come in and be reunited. Jesus loves His church.

- **How is Jesus' rebuke and discipline a form of love?**

Love compels us to do what is best for someone else. Like a parent who wants what is best for his child, Jesus wants what is best for His church. So, He corrects our self-destructive behavior. He redirects our path away from the poverty of sin to the riches of righteousness. Jesus cares more about our eternal well-being than our temporary comfort, so He confronts us for our own good. The Laodiceans' prosperity made them complacent, but Jesus rebuked them in order to reignite their zeal (v. 19).

- **What does verse 20 teach us about the role that God plays and the role that we play in our spiritual growth?**

Jesus does not sit idly and wait for us to repent. He knows where we are spiritually, and He seeks us out. The divine initiative is evident in His presence at the door, His knocking, and His calling, but we have a responsibility to respond. We must listen and open the door. Only then will we be united in fellowship with Jesus and grow in Him.

Read Revelation 3:21-22.

Turning from sin and living in humble dependence upon Jesus is no easy task. The forces of this world are deeply committed to spiritual complacency. Satan is embattled in a fight to make the church believe that her security is in wealth and prosperity. It is an act of spiritual war to open the door and listen to Jesus—to hear His rebuke and experience His love—but it is worth the fight. Jesus comes down to sit at our table, but He raises us up to sit on His throne.

- **How might this promise motivate us to fight against a lukewarm life?**

The lukewarm life is one that is all too common in the present world. It is content with the wealth and prosperity that the present life offers, but it is short-sighted. The promise to reign with Christ awakens us to see the triviality of earthly security and wealth. Whatever sin may offer at the present time, it cannot compare to being enthroned with the Son of God. As James Hamilton wrote, "What Jesus promises goes beyond anything self-reliance and worldly wealth could offer."[6]

- **What voices compete for our attention and distract us from listening to Jesus?**

We live in a world of constant noise. It seems that our ears experience a revolving door of voices throughout each day. We scroll through social media, listen to music, watch Youtube, and stare at screens all day. Often, when I am looking at my phone, I don't hear others well; and I'm certainly not listening. When your attention is always set on something else, it's hard to listen to Jesus. We have to learn to put away distractions and mute out all the noise in order to hear Jesus knocking and speaking.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Jesus calls His people to recognize their need for Him.

Revelation 3:19-20

"In this case, for the church to open the door to Jesus means that the church will rely on Jesus, not on their own resources, and it means that the church will do what Jesus expects it to do rather than what the world expects it to do."[7]

Imagine a church where Jesus is on the outside. He's knocking and wants to come in, but they don't think they really need Him. Perhaps they think their music style, or big building, or charismatic preacher is the special ingredient needed for revival. Revelation 3 reminds us that the key ingredient is a sense of spiritual desperation, the awareness that apart from His presence we have nothing, and apart from His power we can do nothing. Martin Lloyd Jones said, "As long as we think we can organize revival, there is no hope for us. The beginning of revival is to realize that without the manifestation of God's power we can do nothing."[8]

Revelation 3:21-22

"So much of spiritual formation is paying attention to what I pay attention to."[9]

"The preacher can only bring the Word to the ear; the Spirit must bring it from the ear to the heart."[10]

Activity

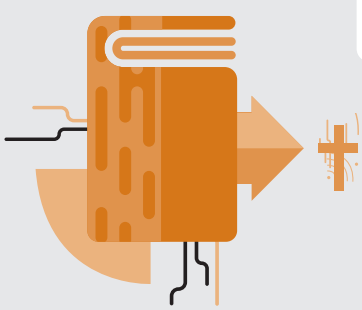
Students should break into pairs and come up with a short skit. In it, one person will be a present-day Christian. They could be having a difficult time with something, or everything could be going right, or somewhere in between. They are suddenly visited by someone (it could even be their future self) from a million years in the future. This future visitor is someone who's been living in the glorious new heavens and new earth that happened after Jesus returned. The future person's job is to remind the present-day Christian of the glorious things to come in order to spur the Christian to good works and love for neighbor and endurance in hope (they are essentially acting out the third point of our lesson). Let them prepare their skits and then share them.

Debrief their skits. Do we Christians often give ourselves hope by remembering Jesus' future glory? How can we remind each other of the glories in store for us so that we pursue holiness more, so that we love people more, so that we hate sin more?

6. James Hamilton Jr., Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches, p.126
7. James Hamilton Jr., Revelation: The Spirit Speaks to the Churches, p.125-126
8. Martin Lloyd Jones via Dane Ortlund's Twitter post, October 21, 2020, 9:25 a.m., https://twitter.com/daneortlund/status/1318921391815741441
9. John Starke, Twitter post, May 4, 2020, 10:15 a.m., https://twitter.com/john_starke/status/1257328060019486721
10. Steven J. Larson, Twitter post, October 12, 2014, 6:30 p.m., https://twitter.com/DrStevenJLawson/status/521442819513536512

(p. 89, DDG) Christ Connection

Because the church is the bride of Christ for whom He died, Jesus cares deeply about its purity. The church experiences purification and renewal through recalling who Jesus is, recognizing sin, repenting of sin, and remembering the reward that awaits those who are faithful to the end.



LIFEWISE Middle School

LESSON 110: WHOLEHEARTEDNESS
THE REDEEMER CALLS US TOWARD RENEWAL

Revelation 3:14-22

THE REDEEMER CALLS US TOWARD RENEWAL

Jesus calls His people to recognize their need for Him.

JESUS CONNECTION

Because the church is the bride of Christ for whom He died, Jesus cares deeply about its purity. The church is purified and renewed through recalling who Jesus is, recognizing and repenting of sin and remembering the reward that awaits those who are faithful to the end.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

WHOLEHEARTEDNESS – Complete dedication in everything I do.

HEAD

Why does Jesus rebuke (criticize) the church at Laodicea?

What does Jesus promise to those who are "zealous and repent" of their sin?

HEART

The Laodicean church was wealthy and prosperous, so they thought God was pleased with them. Why might external realities (money, fame, accomplishments, etc.) not be a good indicator of a right/close relationship with God?

The Laodicean church had closed the door on a close personal relationship with Jesus. Jesus stands at our door and knocks, but He doesn't come barging in. We are free to listen to His voice and open the door, welcoming Him to be close with us … or not. What might keep someone from answering Jesus' knock?

HANDS

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that it is impossible to serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). We can only have one master at a time. It is important to examine who or what is actually our main focus: God, ourselves or someone or something else. Consider these questions to help you determine what your true focus is; ask God to help you put away what distracts you so you can serve Him wholeheartedly.

- What do I spend the most free time doing on a normal day?
- Is there a person I am very afraid to offend or upset because I'm afraid they won't like me anymore?
- When I have money, do I spend or save it? What do I mostly spend it on?
- How much time do I spend building a relationship with God by reading the Bible and praying?

Keep a daily log this week. For each day, write down how much time you spend reading your Bible and/or praying and in a second column, how much or how often you do **one** of the following: spend money, play a sport or video game, do a hobby, do your schoolwork or spend time with your family. At the end of the week, compare the two lists. What does your log reveal about how wholehearted you are?